

## THE NATIONAL EVALUATION OF THE RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD, MARRIAGE AND FAMILY STRENGTHENING GRANTS FOR INCARCERATED AND RE-ENTERING FATHERS AND THEIR PARTNERS



### PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND EVALUATION SUMMARY

#### Introduction

Many relationships, including those between intimate partners and among parents and children, are affected by incarceration. In mid-year 2006, more than 2.2 million individuals were incarcerated in federal or state prisons or in local jails.<sup>1</sup> The majority of incarcerated and reentering prisoners are parents, with 1999 estimates indicating that 55% of state and 63% of federal prisoners had a minor child (the total estimated minor children of these parents was 1.5 million).<sup>2</sup> Relationships are at particularly high risk of disruption when parents are involved in the criminal justice system, and there is currently very little institutional support to assist inmates in maintaining these relationships and transitioning back into their families upon release.

On September 30, 2006, the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Family Assistance (OFA) announced grant awards to 226 organizations to promote healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood. Thirteen<sup>3</sup> of these awards were funded under the Responsible Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated and Re-entering Fathers and Their Partners (MFS-IP) priority area. MFS-IP grantees include government (state, local, and tribal) and private (community- and faith-based) organizations. With a funding level of up to \$500,000 per year for five years, the programs implemented under the MFS-IP priority area are designed to promote and sustain healthy marriages and strengthen families affected by incarceration.

#### ABOUT THIS RESEARCH BRIEF

*This brief was prepared by Christine Lindquist and Anupa Bir of RTI International, under contract to ASPE. It describes the Responsible Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated and Re-entering Fathers and their Partners (MFS-IP) and provides an overview of the implementation and impact evaluation of this initiative.*

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The HHS Healthy Marriage Initiative was created in 2002 for the purpose of helping couples that have chosen or are choosing marriage for themselves gain access to services where they can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain healthy marriages. The initiative includes demonstration projects providing marriage education programs for specific populations, evaluations of those demonstration projects, and other research on the affects of marriage on adult and child well-being. The MFS-IP grants funded, under the authority of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, are part of the HHS Healthy Marriage Initiative.

## MFS-IP Program Overview

MFS-IP grants support the provision of services to promote or sustain healthy relationships for couples with children, where one of the parents is incarcerated or otherwise involved with the criminal justice system (e.g., recently released from incarceration or under parole or probation). In addition to marriage-strengthening activities, grantees may deliver services that improve parenting and promote economic stability. Grantees must develop partnerships involving the criminal justice system and diverse community sectors. The grant also requires that program participation be voluntary and that grantees collaborate with domestic violence experts in the development of their programs.

## Program Components

No one program model is required for MFS-IP grantees, and the sites vary widely in terms of program components delivered and service delivery approach. The broad set of program components planned among the set of grantees includes the following:

- Marriage education curricula
- Marriage/family counseling
- Parenting curricula
- Enhanced visitation options
- Case management
- Education and employment services
- Support groups and cultural activities
- Financial literacy services
- Mentoring and coaching services
- Domestic violence services

## Service Settings and Target Populations

The service settings and target populations vary among the grantees. All grantees plan to deliver services in at least one correctional facility (state prisons, county prisons, county jails, and tribal detention centers are represented), and many grantees will have a community-based component for partners on the outside or for formerly incarcerated inmates enrolled into the program. Many programs also have a post-release component for incarcerated participants who get released during program participation; some programs specifically target a reentry population for this purpose. Although most grantees are serving the general inmate population, a few have targeted specialized populations, such as residents of intensive programming housing units.

## Program Descriptions

Brief descriptions of the MFS-IP programs operated by units of government funded are provided in Table 1. Descriptions of the programs operated by faith and community-based organizations are provided in Table 2.

Table 1.

**MFS-IP Grantee Brief Program Summaries: Government Agencies**

State, Local, and Tribal Government Agencies
<p><b>Cangleska, Inc. will target all male residents of Pine Ridge Indian Reservation (South Dakota) who have been convicted in tribal court for domestic violence and are incarcerated in the tribal jail. Men and partners (current or former partners with whom the men have children) are offered the following services: case management, a healthy marriage course, cultural immersion experiences, weekend parenting seminars, support groups, men’s and women’s societies, and other supportive services.</b></p>
<p><b>Child and Family Services of New Hampshire is targeting men incarcerated at two New Hampshire prisons (and will later expand into a third). Participants will take a parenting class and then fathers who are in a committed relationship may elect to take a Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) course with their partners. Fathers who are in either a committed or coparenting relationship and who are within six months of release may also receive family reentry counseling. The program also offers video visiting and child-friendly visitation.</b></p>
<p><b>Indiana Department of Correction (IDOC) is targeting men incarcerated at 13 IDOC facilities who are participants in character-/faith-based living units or graduates of a parenting class. Participants from the living unit receive a parenting curriculum and a classroom PREP course as part of the core curriculum of the living unit. Men from the living unit and the parenting class graduates who are in a committed relationship and whose partners are willing to participate will take part in a PREP couples retreat.</b></p>
<p><b>Maryland Department of Human Resources is funding programs in five Maryland counties. Participants must be currently or formerly incarcerated and in a committed relationship. At least one member of the couple must have a child. Program components include case management, a healthy marriage course (Exploring Healthy Relationships or Marriage with Fragile Families), and, as needed, employment services and domestic violence services. The program is designed to be completed in six months.</b></p>
<p><b>New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJ DOC) is targeting men incarcerated at four NJ DOC facilities who are either married or in a committed relationship, within approximately six months of release; who have an addiction problem; and who are released without community supervision after serving their full sentences. Couples receive case management (which includes assistance with visitation) and a marriage education/parenting curriculum (Married and Loving It). Men also receive a substance abuse plan and referrals. Services are provided for at least six months after release.</b></p>
<p><b>Shelby County Division of Corrections (Memphis, Tennessee) is targeting men incarcerated at a county prison who are in a committed relationship and have at least four months left to serve. Program components include a relationship strengthening course (PAIRS), child-friendly visitation, parenting education, family group conferencing, GED/higher education, employment services, moral recognition therapy, and case management.</b></p>

Table 2.

**MFS-IP Grantee Brief Program Summaries: CBOs and FPOs**

<b>Community- and Faith-Based Organizations</b>
<p><b>Centerforce is targeting fathers incarcerated at a California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation facility who are residents in a rehabilitation-oriented housing unit, within three to 12 months of release, and planning to return to the Bay Area. Program components include a marriage/parenting curriculum for men (Back to the Family Man [BTFM]) and a marriage curriculum for partners (Back to the Family [BTF]). Couples who have completed BTFM/BTF can also receive three months of pre- and six months of post-release family reunification case management.</b></p>
<p><b>Council on Crime and Justice is targeting fathers from the Minneapolis -St. Paul area incarcerated in Minnesota DOC facilities who are in a committed relationship, and have a sentence of six months to three years. Eligible participants begin receiving services immediately after intake and are followed for at least one year after release. Program components, all of which are provided to both members of the couple, include case management, parenting classes, a PREP course, financial literacy, and employment referrals, training, and placement.</b></p>
<p><b>Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota is targeting men who have a child under 18, are in a committed relationship, and are incarcerated in one of four South Dakota DOC facilities. Inmates and their partners will participate in a two-day PREP workshop and will receive five case management visits, including three that will take place during the six months after release. In addition, inmates who are identified as having domestic violence issues will receive a 26-week domestic violence course.</b></p>
<p><b>Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency is targeting incarcerated and formerly incarcerated parents in Oakland County. The incarcerated population will be recruited from county jail facilities and a state prison. Participants and their partners (primary caregivers, custodial parents, spouses, or partners) will receive parenting courses, support groups, and the services of a systems navigator (offering family reentry and strengthening planning/case management, referrals, employment support services, and other services).</b></p>
<p><b>The Osborne Association is offering skills-building exercises at Children’s Centers at three New York Department of Correctional Services facilities. Other program components offered at the same facilities are limited to fathers who are in a committed relationship and include a basic parenting course (a prerequisite for the subsequent courses), a healthy relationships course (Prep for PREP), and a couples’ PREP course.</b></p>
<p><b>People of Principle is targeting fathers who are in a committed relationship and either incarcerated in one of eight West Texas prisons or newly released parolees under supervision in West Texas. The men and their partners receive PREP and possibly a family mediation component.</b></p>
<p><b>The RIDGE Project plans to target men in the father role who are in a committed relationship and incarcerated in any of the 32 Ohio prisons (giving first preference to Northwest Ohio residents) or under community supervision in eight counties in Ohio. The project will serve six prisons per year. The program includes a core communication class, the Keeping FAITH curriculum, a couples’ communication course, special visitation, and a Ten Great Dates program (for non-incarcerated couples only).</b></p>

## The National Evaluation of MFS-IP

The evaluation of program implementation and effectiveness is an important component of the MFS-IP initiative. RTI International was contracted by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) to conduct a seven-year national evaluation. The evaluation began in October 2006, with the first year focused on evaluation design and documentation of program start-up. The overall goals of the national evaluation of MFS-IP are to describe program implementation in all 13 sites and to determine the impact of programming in a smaller subset of sites. Specifically, the impact evaluation component of the MFS-IP national evaluation will assess whether delivering marriage education programming within the context of particular correctional settings are successful in fostering healthy marriages, strengthening families, and easing community re-entry.

### Evaluation Framework

Although each of the sites is unique, RTI has developed a framework for the evaluation that can accommodate site variation (Figure 1). The framework first isolates *inputs* as the key factors necessary to implement MFS-IP programming at each site; these include such things as ACF funding, technical assistance, and federal grant requirements. Inputs also include the partnerships grantees are able to form and existing resources external to the site that, in combination with site specific resources, yield a comprehensive set of services and programs available to the program participants (*throughputs*). The resulting *outputs* are the number of clients (both the incarcerated individuals and their partners) served by the program, the dosage of services received by program participants, systems-level change affected by the program, and sustainability strategies implemented. The measurement of the changes in knowledge and behaviors (*outcomes*) for participants and their children is an important factor in the evaluation framework. A variety of key intermediate and long-term outcomes are measured in the evaluation. Finally, as illustrated in the framework, community and individual participant characteristics influence the throughputs, outputs, and outcomes.

### Evaluation Components

The evaluation has been designed to answer the following research questions:

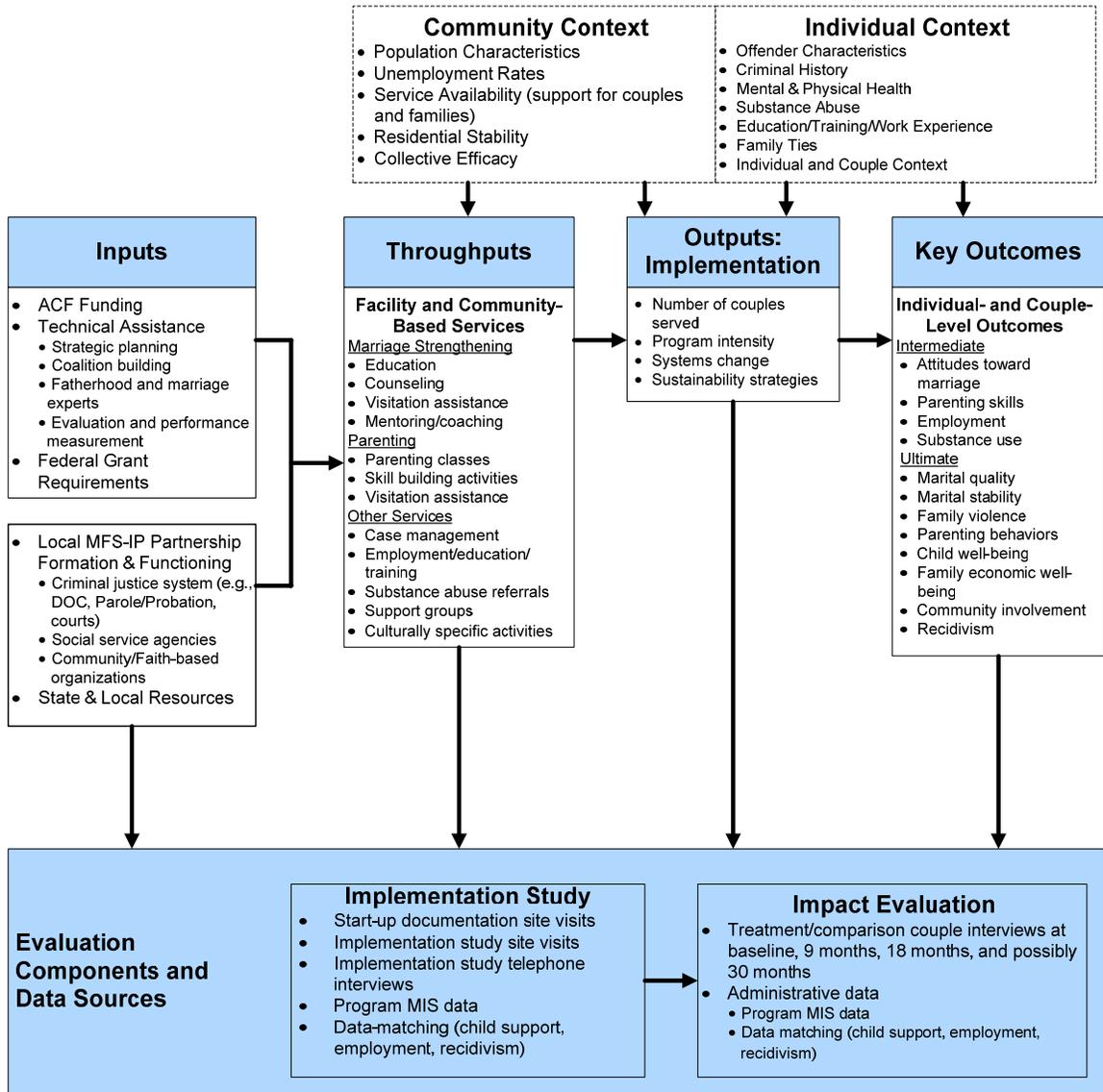
- What are the defining characteristics of the grantees and their programs?
- What lessons can be learned from program implementation?
- How successful were the programs at achieving the desired outcomes?
- To what extent do the interventions appear to have a positive impact?

In addressing these questions, the evaluation includes an implementation assessment and an impact evaluation.

The **implementation study** primarily assesses the inputs, throughputs and outputs of the projects. It will characterize all 13 programs along a variety of dimensions, including program design, contextual factors shaping program development, project structure, target population, service model, interagency collaborations, and challenges and lessons learned. The primary sources of data for the implementation assessment are in-person interviews with local stakeholders (conducted through annual site visits) and administrative data.

The **impact study**, which will be conducted in five of the 13 sites, will assess the effectiveness of the MFS-IP programming on participant outcomes. These include marital stability, relationship quality, positive family interactions, family financial well-being, and recidivism. Outcomes will be assessed

**Figure 1. MFS-IP Evaluation Framework**



through longitudinal data collection for both the incarcerated individuals, their partners and through administrative data matching. The impact study will include approximately 2,000 couples across the five sites. Initial in-person survey data collection will take place at baseline. Additional interviews are planned for nine months and 18 months after baseline. There is a potential for a fourth wave of data collection at approximately 25-27 months. The interview will gather detailed data on the background characteristics (e.g., demographics, attitudes, motivation, criminal history, relationship history) and service provision (e.g., types of services received, delivery format, number and duration of sessions). In addition, at each interview point, outcomes will be assessed along several dimensions, including

- relationship quality and stability,
- parenting and child well-being,
- employment and economic stability, and
- criminal behavior and substance abuse.

The analyses of the impact data will focus on differences in intermediate and long-term outcomes between treatment and comparison or control couples. The role of individual- and couple-level factors on outcomes will be considered, as well as programmatic dimensions and other site-level factors that may influence program effectiveness.

## Implications

Information from the MFS-IP evaluation will assist federal, state, and community policy makers and funding agencies in identifying effective approaches for the provision of support to families affected by incarceration. Lessons from the implementation study will provide guidance to other organizations interested in delivering marriage and family strengthening services to individuals involved in the criminal justice system. Findings from the impact evaluation will inform decisions about particular approaches to marriage and family strengthening services empirically demonstrated to be most effective with correctional populations and their partners and families.

The next brief will be on the program models of the MFS-IP project grants. Additional briefs, topical reports, and other products will be generated from the MFS-IP evaluation on a periodic basis throughout the contract period.

***For additional information about the MFS-IP Evaluation, contact Anupa Bir:(781) 434-1708, [abir@rti.org](mailto:abir@rti.org); or Christine Lindquist: (919) 485-5706, [lindquist@rti.org](mailto:lindquist@rti.org).***

Impact sites will be chosen using the following criteria:

- Sufficient **program intensity** and provision of **couple-based relationship services**
- Sufficient **projected enrollment** to support a treatment and control group
- Programs' **stage of implementation** indicates a stable program design
- **Evaluation design** possibilities, such as opportunity for random assignment or the identification of an appropriate comparison group, are strong

A site-specific study design will be developed for each impact site.

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<sup>1</sup> Sabol, William J., Todd D. Minton, and Paige M. Harrison. Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2006. Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin. June 2007, NCJ 217675.

<sup>2</sup> Mumola, Christopher J. Incarcerated Parents and Their Children. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. August 2000, NCJ 182335.

<sup>3</sup> Originally, 14 grants were awarded. One site relinquished its award after the first year.

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